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Written statement* submitted by the AUA Americas Chapter Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Escalating Persecution of Iraq's Indigenous Assyrians Demands Greater Attention from the Human Rights Council[1]

By Rosemary Youhana and Alen Mirza[2]

I. Persecution of Assyrians by the So-Called Islamic State

1. On June 7, heavy fighting between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the so-called Islamic State (IS) erupted in Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. The subsequent mass displacement has created a humanitarian crisis and has left thousands of IDPs without access to water, healthcare and adequate shelter. Iraq's indigenous Assyrian Christians and other minorities remain largely defenseless in what is evolving into a regional sectarian conflict. On July 17, the so-called Islamic State issued a citywide statement declaring that all remaining Christians in Mosul had until July 19 to either convert to Islam, pay a fine, or die. Consequently, Mosul has been nearly emptied of its Assyrian Christian population.[3] On August 7, 2014, IS militants seized control of the predominantly Assyrian villages of Qaraqosh, Tel Keppe, Bartella, and Karamlish in the Nineveh Plain, prompting a majority of their residents to flee their ancestral homes.[4] IS's advances into the Nineveh Plain region left its Assyrians fearing for their lives and as such, caused a mass migration into the KRG region of over 200,000 people.[5]

2. In the past, such mass displacement of minorities from Mosul often resulted with Assyrians representing a disproportionately large number of Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries. In 2011, Christians made up 52 percent of new UNHCR-registered Iraqi refugees in Turkey[6] and more than half of new UNHCR-registered Iraqi refugees in Lebanon.[7] The statistic is alarming when considering that the community represented just 3 percent of Iraq's population before 2003. Furthermore, while Assyrians were believed to number 1.4 million before the 2003 invasion, current estimates place the community at less than half that size.[8] Essentially, aside from the evidence that the current Government of Iraq is unwilling and/or incapable of protecting its non-Muslim and indigenous communities, especially the Christians, there is a very strong likelihood that Christianity as whole will be completely "cleansed" from Iraq and Syria, and quite possibly the Middle East region.

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[1] AUA Americas works to reform laws, policies, and practices that affect the rights of Assyrian people in their ancestral homeland. For more information, please visit www.auaamericas.org.

[2] Rosemary Youhana serves as AUA Americas' Global Policy Associate. Alen Mirza serves as AUA Americas' Global Policy Director.

[3] "Iraq Christians get Islamic State's warning." *Al Jazeera English*, July 19, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/iraq-christians-told-convert-face-death-201471811040982432.html (accessed February 14 2015).

[4] "From Crisis to Catastrophe: the situation of minorities in Iraq." Minority Rights Group International, October 2014, www.minorityrights.org/download.php@id=1468 (accessed February 14, 2015).

[5] Id.

[6] Mid-Year Review of the Regional Response Plan for Iraqi Refugees 2012, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, September 10, 2012, 115 https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/CAP/MYR_2012_Iraq_RRP.pdf (accessed March 14, 2014).

[7] Id. at 76.

[8] Annual Report 2013, United States Commission on International Reli Egious Freedom, April 2013, 88, http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf

II. Abuses Recognized by UN Human Rights Bodies

3. The ongoing persecution faced by Iraq's Assyrians has not gone unnoticed, as many governments, NGOs, and UN treaty bodies have expressed deep distress for the future of this community. In its most recent Concluding Observations of Iraq, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed serious concern about the emergence of sectarian insurgency targeting Assyrians, their holy sites, and businesses, particularly in the Nineveh Plain.[9] The Committee also recognized the alarming decrease in the population of Iraq's Assyrians falling to nearly one third of its pre-2003 population.[10] In light of the particular challenges faced by Iraq's minority populations, the Committee issued a rare Early Warning Decision urging the "UN Secretary General and Security Council for the deployment of UN Peacekeeping forces to the Nineveh Plain to establish a safe zone for the return and protection of displaced persons traditionally living in that area."

4. In 2015, the Committee on the Rights of the Child also expressed deep concern at the current situation faced by Assyrian Christian children and families, who have been subjected to a number of systematic human rights abuses by ISIL, including murder, torture, rape, and forced conversion to Islam. In one paragraph, the Committee expressed its "deepest concern at the deplorable situation of children and families belonging to minority groups, in particular [...] Christians [...] Assyrians [...] who are systematically killed, tortured, raped, forced to convert to Islam, cut off from humanitarian assistance by the so-called ISIL in a reported attempt by the so-called ISIL members to suppress, permanently cleanse or expel, or in some instances, destroy these minority communities."[11] The Committee, in addition to finding the so-called ISIL responsible for such policies, also holds the Republic of Iraq accountable for a legacy of impunity, which stems from the inability or unwillingness to take legal recourse against ISIL. [12]

III. Recommendations to the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

5. In light of these attested abuses, AUA Americas respectfully urges the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues to address the various human rights concerns currently facing Iraq's ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities by exercising the authority of her mandate to conduct a country visit in Iraq and issue an independent evaluation of the situation of minorities living in that country. The Special Rapporteur addressed a number of issues in the report on her country visit to the Ukraine, and draws particular attention to the

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[9] United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. "Concluding observations on the combined fifteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Iraq." September 22, 2014. http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhsl%2fyrM1B9TT0oGmEKg0FjIEwMF9bGJy499K02CASWN9%2bc3BPhhEahd628Y9jRSy39DiAbJT369VFyTJ8uBlEE3L5%2fpg6XZS2bBuWmI8bHXrsphx28HUM0oROBp4Fd6CwlQ%3d%3d (accessed February 14, 2015.)

[10] Id.

[11] United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Prevention of Racial Discrimination, Including Early Warning and Urgent Action Procedures, Iraq. Decision 1, 85th Session. August 11-29, 2014. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CERD/EarlyWarning/early-warningDecisionIraq.pdf (accessed February 15, 2014).

[12] United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child. "Concluding observations on the combined second to fourth periodic reports of Iraq." February 4, 2015. http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CRC/Shared%20Documents/IRQ/CRC_C_IRQ_CO_2-4%20ADVANCE%20UNEDITED%20VERSION_19495_E.doc (accessed February 14, 2015.)

dire situation of the ethno-religious Crimean Tatar minority. Not unlike this group, the Assyrian Christian minority of Iraq has faced comparable persecution and impunity. For the following reasons, a country visit to Iraq, pursuant to her mandate, will prove both feasible in execution and necessary in better identifying and addressing specific human rights concerns:

6. First, pursuant to Iraq's initial Universal Periodic Review in 2010, the Government of Iraq issued a standing invitation to all Human Rights Council Special Procedures.[13] Since issuing the standing invitation, the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and the Working Group on Mercenaries have both carried-out country visits in Iraq, illustrating the government's willingness to genuinely participate in the UN's special procedures mechanism. To date, no Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues has conducted a country visit in the Middle East nor requested a country visit in any part of the Arab World.[14]

7. Second, the several UN bodies currently present in Iraq provide the necessary support to successfully carry out the objectives of a country visit. The integrated and statewide presence of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) allows for facilitated access to government officials and information, while specialized UN agencies such as the UN High Commissioner on Refugees and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs provide a comprehensive analysis of particular human rights concerns affecting Iraqi minorities.

8. Lastly, the recent war and subsequent political unrest in Iraq has disproportionately affected Iraq's minority groups. A 2014 UNAMI report states, "Members of Iraq's diverse religious, cultural and ethnic minority groups have come under direct attack by ISIL and associated armed groups – particularly non Sunni populations."[15] Many expert commentators have expressed concerns that these populations are losing viability and visibility in the socio-political spectrum within Iraq, and that their populations may not be able to recover from the current state of affairs.

9. The needs of the ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in Iraq reflect the thematic priorities of the Special Rapporteur's mandate, specifically in the context of promoting social inclusion and ensuring stable societies. It is pertinent for Iraq, and for the work of the Human Rights Council, that timely evaluation of human rights challenges facing Iraq's minorities takes place before the damage being done escapes any repairs that the international community can provide.

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[13] www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Invitations/aspx

[14] www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/IExpert/Pages/visits.aspx

[15] United Nations, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. "Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq. 5 June – 5 July 2014. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_POC%20Report_FINAL_18July2014A.pdf (accessed 15 February 2015).